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SIPDIS

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MTS
PASS TO PEACE CORPS

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR EMPHASIZES ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL
PRESERVATION IN NORTHERN PHILIPPINES

11. Summary: The Ambassador visited three provinces in Northern Luzon December 5 to 7 and spoke to enthusiastic crowds principally on the theme of preservation. She presented the Embassy's International Woman of Courage award to Isabela Provincial Governor Grace Padaca, delivered an address to 65 international experts at a conference sponsored by the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation, and distributed seedlings to farmers at a USDA-funded site. The Ambassador also remembered slain Peace Corps volunteer Julia Campbell at the site of a forested memorial park. End Summary.

THE PROVINCES OF CAGAYAN, ISABELA AND IFUGAO

12. Cagayan province, in the northeastern tip of the Philippines, and Isabela province directly to the south, are the rice and corn granary of Luzon island. Other agricultural products such as peanuts, fruits, and livestock (mainly cattle, carabao, and poultry) drive the regions' economies. Logging bans have caused the wood industry to decline considerably. However, furniture using narra wood and other indigenous forest materials continues to be made.

13. Ifugao, a landlocked province in the mountainous region of Luzon, is home to the Banaue Rice Terraces, a UNESCO World Heritage Site often called the "Eighth Wonder of the World." The rice variety most suited to the area's cool climate takes a long time to mature and limits the terraces' yield. As a result, some Ifugao families abandon their land in pursuit of alternative livelihoods. IFUGAO AND THE BANAUE RICE TERRACES

14. The Ambassador addressed approximately 65 international delegates attending a Banaue training conference arranged by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). The Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation partially funded this conference focused on preserving the Rice Terraces. A film team preparing a documentary about the conference for Philippine national television interviewed the Ambassador.

15. The Ambassador visited two Peace Corps projects December 6 near to where Peace Corps volunteer Julia Campbell was murdered in April 12007. The Ambassador recognized this loss by visiting Asipulo, where 40 hectares have been donated for the Julia Campbell Agroforest Memorial Park. Mayors of surrounding towns expressed their hope that this tragedy would not deter the presence of volunteers in the future, a sentiment which the Ambassador supported. Asipulo's mayor thanked the Ambassador for visiting difficult-to-reach portions of the northern Philippines, which helped counter the perception among some that the Muslim south commands more U.S. attention than other regions, he said. WOMAN OF COURAGE AWARD TO ISABELA GOVERNOR PADACA

16. In the Isabela provincial capital of Ilagan, the Ambassador presented Governor Grace Padaca on December 5 with an International Woman of Courage award for overcoming physical challenges while promoting government transparency. Padaca, who had traveled to the U.S. on a U.S.-sponsored Aquino Fellowship, said her stay made a significant impact on her approach to democracy and transparency. Padaca subsequently won two contentious elections and says that as

governor she is using a spirit of openness to unite people. The Ambassador's visit coincided with a monthly "People's Day" when any resident can request an audience with local officials. Further underscoring the theme of open access to government, the Ambassador witnessed the opening of a newly constructed handicapped access ramp at the capitol building.

USDA-FUNDED SITE IN CAGAYAN

¶7. Near Tuguegarao City the Ambassador visited a cacao nursery funded by the USDA Food for Progress program and witnessed ongoing training in propagation and grafting techniques. The program will enable 20,000 farmers to benefit from better cocoa-farming practices.

MEDIA COVERAGE

¶8. Local and national newspapers and radio and television networks covered the Ambassador's visit. Coverage of the conference to preserve the rice terraces and the ceremony honoring Governor Padaca were positive. One national newspaper article focused on the Ambassador's comments about how the Peace Corps is working hard to move forward with good projects that will honor the memory of slain Peace Corps Volunteer Julia Campbell. The Ambassador's visit to the USDA-funded cacao cultivation project attracted coverage from Tuguegarao-region cable TV stations and radios.

¶9. The Ambassador fielded questions from the press about the Julia Campbell murder, aid to the region following a recent typhoon, and the status of Lance Corporal Daniel Smith, who is being held in the U.S. Embassy compound under terms of the Visiting Forces Agreement.

KENNEY